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Vassar College

Crezcamos Juntas:
Envisioning a Latina Women's Well-Being Workshop Series at
Adriance Memorial Public Library

A Senior Project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Latin American and Latinx Studies

by
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Chapter One

Foundations of This Project: Collaboration and Reciprocity

This project emerged out of my ongoing collaboration with Elva Margarita Corbatón, a full-time library assistant at Adriance Memorial Public Library. Margarita and I first had the opportunity to work together in the spring of 2018, when we co-taught most of the practice sessions for Poughkeepsie’s annual Spanish Spelling Bee. Through our collaborative teaching, debriefing, and planning of workshops for emerging bilingual elementary and middle schoolers, we realized that we were able to communicate and improvise effectively as a team. Margarita and I not only developed a strong working relationship, but also formed a deep, trusting friendship in our collaboration. As I got to know Margarita, I saw how much experience and insight she holds as a leader and a resource for Poughkeepsie’s Latinx community.¹ I began to consider the possibility of working with Margarita on my senior project. In my initial brainstorming of collaborative project ideas, I found myself returning to the invaluable lessons in trust and reciprocity that I had learned while abroad in Bolivia the previous semester.

I spent my three-week “independent study period” in Bolivia living among over 100 adolescent girls at a rural Catholic boarding school. During my time there, I gradually discarded the linear research paper outline I had brought with me and dedicated my energy towards developing trust and friendship with the students and teachers. By centering these relationships, I saw with new clarity the powerful ways in which the students and teachers were working together to preserve and celebrate the cultural traditions of their town through a schoolwide

¹ Throughout this project, I have been careful to select the terms with which I refer to the population that Margarita and I hope to reach through this workshop series. It has been challenging to figure out which descriptors are most appropriate, as the people whom I am referring to are not a homogenous group and I do not want to portray them as such. For example, I am careful not to conflate “Latinx” with “Spanish-speaking,” nor to assume that all Spanish-speaking Latinx adults are by default immigrants. I select how I alternate between these descriptors out of respect for the diversity of people’s identities and experiences, and to best fit the specific aspects of the different identities that I will discuss throughout this analysis.

theater piece. I scrapped my research paper in favor of a children's book project that recounted their theater piece in the form of a story. With the book, I aimed to amplify the students' message of cultural revitalization and create something that could reach the hands of the school administrators and students who had opened their school to me. I had read endlessly about the importance of centering the knowledge of research participants, but in Bolivia, I learned through challenging, complex experiences how to put such concepts into practice. I came to adopt the grounding principle of reciprocity during every step of this community-based research and while developing my final project.

These lessons from Bolivia motivated me to consider how my senior project could foster reciprocity with the Poughkeepsie community by centering and taking leadership from community members and their multiple forms of knowledge. During my collaboration with Margarita in the spring, I learned that her formal title of Spanish-Speaking Library Assistant does not capture just how many forms of labor she performs at Adriance Memorial Library. In a conversation about her role in the library, Margarita described herself as holding a double responsibility. As one of two Spanish-speaking employees, Margarita not only plans, implements, and publicizes all the Spanish-language programming at the library; she also supports many Spanish-speaking library visitors as they express their concerns, their specific needs for assistance, and their personal struggles in daily life.

Margarita expressed that, while she enjoys both forms of work, she finds the latter to be particularly moving: *“Me siento más útil cuando puedo apoyar a las demás personas, porque me puedo poner en sus zapatos. Es muy conmovedor para mí, porque en muchos de los casos yo he vivido lo que las otras personas están viviendo. Y el enseñar, me ha hecho aprender. Y no me*

*importa ni quién me enseñe cosas nuevas ni qué tipo de aprendizaje sea.”*² From these and other conversations with Margarita, I came to deeply admire her work and grew interested in being a part of that work. I began to wonder how she and I could create a project that would simultaneously benefit the library’s programming, Poughkeepsie’s immigrant communities, and my learning as a student with commitments to immigrant rights and public service. I decided to ask Margarita about extending our collaboration through my senior project.

² Translation: “I feel the most helpful when I can help other people because I can put myself in their shoes. It’s very moving for me, because in many cases, I have gone through what other people are going through. And when I teach, I learn. And I don’t care who teaches me something new, nor what kind of learning it might be.” Although I remember Margarita’s statement very clearly, this quote itself is a slight paraphrasing based on what I recall. Since our initial collaboration in Spring 2018, Margarita and I have communicated solely in Spanish, except when in spaces with monolingual English speakers. I have chosen to include Margarita’s comments in Spanish with translations to English in the footnotes.

Chapter Two

Making a Space for Spanish-Speaking Latina Women ³

In May of 2018, Margarita and I met at the library to discuss the possibility of working together the following year. In keeping with my efforts to center her knowledge, I asked Margarita whether she had perceived any needs or interests among participants in her programs and other members of Poughkeepsie’s Latinx community. Margarita’s enthusiasm and abundance of observations indicated to me just how deeply she engages with the people she serves. In all of her experiences and ideas, she emphasized the importance of creating more spaces for Spanish-speaking women at the library. Margarita described how women had come to her with problems that stemmed from the strains and traumas of migration, unhealthy relationships, and the overall lowering of self-esteem that women can feel as a result of their personal experiences with systems of oppression. We began to explore the possibility of a women’s workshop series as an uplifting space where participants could help each other find strength in themselves and as a collective.

As we talked through Margarita’s ideas, I brought in my experiences working with adolescent girls in New York, Bolivia, and El Salvador.⁴ My experience at the Bolivian boarding school had given me a glimpse of the immense strength, creativity, and sense of community that can emerge from spaces created by women for other women. I also saw some of the challenges

³ My use of the word “woman”/ “women” and our creation of a space for “women” have been troubling for me to navigate throughout this project. On the one hand, I recognize the ways in which cisgender supposed feminists them/ourselves have used the term “women” to exclude trans* and gender non-conforming people from their/our supposed aims. I also understand that the word “women” itself can cause feelings of exclusion and erasure among trans* and gender non-conforming individuals. On the other hand, I recognize that I am working with an older generation of adults who are predominantly immigrants from Latin American countries and who are immersed in different contexts and different conversations than my own. I therefore consider the aiming of our workshop towards “women”/ “mujeres” to be suitable for the experiences of this population and for the project at hand.

⁴ In the summers of 2014 and 2015, my high school best friend and I volunteered at a public school near her father’s home in a small town in El Salvador. We taught English classes to other high school students and formed friendships with some of the girls at the school, two of whom I am still in touch with today.

and conflicts that arose in that environment and considered how the school environment could better support the students' growth and self-esteem. What surfaced repeatedly in my conversation with Margarita was the importance of creating a space where women could educate themselves and one another, speak and listen to each other, and develop a greater sense of their self-worth while in community with others.

Margarita told me that she had dreamt for a long time about creating such a workshop series and had even imagined titling it “*Instituto de la Mujer*” (Women’s Institute).⁵ She explained how, by learning something new and engaging with each other in the process, women at the library could realize new strengths within themselves and fortify their self-esteem in the face of diverse obstacles. Margarita captured the potential of such workshops with a sentence that stuck with me for months to come: “*Tú empiezas a saber lo que vales cuando te das cuenta de lo que eres capaz.*”⁶ As we continued discussing the topics that women could learn about and the ways we could center women’s strengths, knowledges, and experiences, I grew passionate about the potential of this project and confident in how our collaboration could unfold. This was the initial conversation that sparked our collective vision for the project.

In our subsequent conversations, Margarita and I weighed and eventually affirmed the importance of holding the workshops in Spanish. Initially, I had some concerns about our narrowing of the intended group for these sessions. In my Vassar courses, I had read and learned about the importance of building coalitions across differences in identity, both within movements and in general efforts to strengthen a sense of community. I therefore briefly considered whether

⁵ In a conversation in February 2019, we ended up deciding on Margarita’s suggestion, *Crezcamos Juntas*, as the workshop title. Margarita mentioned the concept of an *instituto* sounded too broad for what we were looking to develop, and I added that it seemed to insinuate a more top-down, technical approach to knowledge and learning. *Crezcamos Juntas* conveys the collective and co-constructive approach that Margarita and I have emphasized in our planning of this program.

⁶ “You begin to realize what you’re worth when you realize all that you’re capable of.”

the workshops could effectively bridge language barriers through translation and interpretation and thus bring together women of different racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. I wondered whether a workshop series intended to support women's well-being would be in some way exclusionary if we held all the sessions in Spanish and therefore only reached women in the Spanish-speaking Latinx community.

However, over the course of our collaborative work and conversations, I came to understand why we needed to gear this workshop towards Poughkeepsie's Spanish-speaking Latina community. In her response to my concerns, Margarita made the important point that Poughkeepsie's Latinx immigrant population experiences unique obstacles to their access to and engagement with the library. She described how most of the library's materials and programs are already in English and therefore facilitate easier access and navigation for English-speaking visitors. I saw some evidence of this language imbalance in the Poughkeepsie Public Library fall programs catalogue and calendar, in which only page number 20 of 24 is written in Spanish and lists the Spanish-language programs that are available.

I understood the reality of these disparities in access even more clearly when Margarita told me about the following situation: In September of 2018, a group of Latinx engineers had launched a program intended to teach Latinx children and their parents about computer programming. She explained that several non-Latinx English-speaking parents had quickly learned of this opportunity and immediately begun to enroll their children. The engineers had intended for the course to be conducted in Spanish and geared towards other immigrants and children of immigrants, so Margarita sent a burst of text messages via WhatsApp to all the library visitors she'd worked with. In the course of one night, she filled the remaining seats in the class with Latinx emerging bilingual children and their parents. This anecdote struck me as a

testament to Margarita's resourcefulness as a community leader, and also as clear evidence of how English-speaking, non-immigrant families can find information with much less effort or hesitation than can immigrant families that speak languages other than English.

The results of the surveys that Margarita and I have conducted reflect the lack of accessible information about the library for Poughkeepsie's Spanish-speaking Latinx population. Over our survey period, we spoke with a total of thirty-one Spanish-speaking women. Eight of these survey respondents had participated in programs affiliated with the library in the past. Margarita and I intentionally surveyed these eight women via telephone or during a baking class at the library. The remaining twenty-three respondents were surveyed in public spaces at random. Of these twenty-three women, seven had visited the library before; three had heard of the library but never visited it; and the remaining thirteen survey respondents stated that they had never heard of the Poughkeepsie Public Library before.

In our conversations with community members, I have also realized that immigrants come from different social and cultural contexts in which the public libraries do not play the same role as they generally do in the United States. During our outreach work, Margarita and I spoke to a founding owner of a local Poughkeepsie business who described how the *casas de cultura* in Mexico provided more of the cultural, creative, and educational programs common to American public libraries than the Mexican public libraries themselves. He and Margarita discussed how, for their generation living in Mexico, the public library was a place to read books and conduct some academic research, and that even the programs at the *casas de cultura* depended partially upon the current First Lady and her forms of managing such programs.

Scholars have written about how differences in cultural contexts, along with multiple other factors, can impact immigrants' interactions with American public libraries. Thomas et al.

(2016) enumerate “language proficiency, lack of knowledge regarding local community programs and organizations, discrimination, stigma, mistrust, and low socioeconomic status... identified poverty, low-wage and insecure employment, social exclusivity, racism, and white privilege within receiving communities” as just some of a wide array of obstacles that often impact immigrant communities’ engagement with public libraries (p. 78). As I have described throughout this chapter, different combinations of these factors often inhibit the knowledge and use of public libraries among Spanish-speaking immigrant populations in Poughkeepsie. The information about the public library is more readily available in English and thus seems to travel more quickly among English-speaking Poughkeepsie residents than among Spanish-speakers. Additionally, many Latinx Poughkeepsie residents explained to me that their long work hours and family responsibilities often keep them from attending events at the library.

It is also important to consider how immigrant populations may perceive the public library as a government-funded institution. The complexities of the “mistrust” listed briefly in the above passage proved especially significant in our planning of how to conduct our outreach surveys with Poughkeepsie’s Latinx immigrant communities. As Margarita has explained, and as I have gathered in my work since 2016, immigrants’ existing fears of deportation have been highly exacerbated by the xenophobic policies and rhetoric of this political moment. As a result, many immigrants may hesitate to enter public institutions or share information with those affiliated with them, for fear that these places and people are connected to immigration enforcement authorities and will share their information. Therefore, Margarita and I took care to focus our surveys on general questions about people’s knowledge about the library without asking for personal information beyond a phone number, which was optional information. We have also agreed to clarify, when necessary, that the purpose of the survey is to provide resources

and support to immigrant communities and that we are not connected to immigration enforcement institutions.

Taken together, my academic research on this topic, Margarita's experiences working with Spanish-speaking library visitors, and our conversations with each other and with Latinx community members have shed light on some of the multiple interlocking issues that affect Spanish-speaking Latinas in Poughkeepsie. Given that immigrant and non-immigrant Latina women's experiences are shaped in part by the intersections between language barriers, racial discrimination and xenophobia, fears of deportation, and the harms of patriarchy (or *machismo*), the opening of access to a community-oriented space for Spanish-speaking Latinas becomes especially significant. As I will discuss further in Chapters Four and Five, the social connections that participants would develop with one another through *Crezcamos Juntas* could become sources of support in the face of these intersecting stressors on their well-being. Margarita and I hope that by engaging in these workshops, the participants can not only come to feel more welcome in the library, but can also learn about new skills and ideas while developing a sense of trust and community with others.

Chapter Three

The Site: Public Libraries and Immigrant Populations

Contemporary scholarship around public libraries emphasizes their potential to bring communities together and provide resources that go “beyond books” alone. In their article, Zurinski et al. (2013) describe libraries through sociologist Ray Oldenburg’s (1999) concept of the “third place”: “the place, besides home and work, where people go to spend time” (p. 71). Several scholars have argued that public libraries serve as effective third places within their larger communities, particularly because people view them as safer and more trustworthy spaces than other government institutions.

For immigrant communities, this point is particularly significant. On the one hand, as Vårheim (2014) notes from his interviews with librarians, “Trust [towards libraries] is especially low among undocumented immigrants who see libraries as signaling danger in the same manner as any other government institution” (p. 268). However, Vårheim (2014) explains that trust towards libraries can develop among undocumented immigrants if their friends first recommend that they visit the library (p. 268). He writes, “in comparison with other institutions, libraries are regarded as one of the safest places to visit” (Vårheim 2014:268). Indeed, as mentioned, Margarita gathers many of the participants in her programming through word-of-mouth and text messages. These informal and personalized modes of communication seem to help people feel comfortable at the library, particularly for immigrants who may have had little experience, or negative experiences, with other public institutions.

The existing literature also describes libraries as sites where immigrants can find free resources, meet other community members, develop necessary skills, and learn about American society. In their article on immigrants’ participation at the Hartford Public Library, for example, Thomas et al. (2015) mention The American Place (TAP), which is “a library program designed

to assist immigrants through the provision of services, including legal advice, educational classes, access to computers, and job and career referrals” (p. 81). Coleman and Hadley (2013) describe a similar World Language Services program at Saint Paul Public Library, in which library volunteers traveled to different neighborhoods and taught immigrants computer skills in their home languages (p. 16). These case studies reflect the importance of public libraries as sites for immigrant communities to access free resources and to build relationships that can help them navigate new situations.

Adriance Memorial Public Library offers similar services for Spanish-speaking immigrant and non-immigrant Poughkeepsie residents. In the library catalogue, the listed Spanish-language programs include: English classes, computer classes, the *Soluciones para Hispanohablantes* (Solutions for Spanish-speakers) hotline, and bilingual conferences about the library, immigration, and financial wellness. In an interview, Jessica Sherman, who works in adult programming, Spanish-language collections, and database management at Adriance Memorial Public Library, also mentioned that the library often invites bilingual guests from outside organizations to provide information about health care, electric bills, and other key topics for Poughkeepsie residents.⁷

However, an aspect unique to Adriance Library is its variety of programs for Spanish speakers that go beyond the provision of services and resources. These programs aim to provide Spanish speakers with welcoming, culturally relevant, and intellectually and socially stimulating spaces. Such groups include the bilingual knitting and hand-sewing club (*Haciendo Lazos de Amistad*), the cooking and baking club (*Latinas en la Cocina*), the Spanish-language book club

⁷ Sherman, Jessica. 2018. Interview by Isabel Schneck, Adriance Memorial Public Library, Poughkeepsie, NY, November 20.

(*Almas Hispanas*) and events for children, such as the bilingual story time group and a series of bilingual coding classes. In my view, these programs hold special significance because they transcend the usual needs which libraries most commonly seek to address when working with immigrant populations and speakers of other languages: citizenship, literacy, and finances. The social and recreational programs that I have described offer alternative spaces that insist upon the inclusion of immigrants in recreational and intellectual library activities.

This is not to negate the crucial nature of services that help immigrants navigate complicated institutions and resolve logistic concerns. Rather, by offering spaces for friendship and enjoyment, Adriance Memorial Library actively acknowledges that immigrant communities are more than just a population in need of assistance. These programs engage immigrants and other Spanish-speakers in Poughkeepsie from a more holistic standpoint by recognizing that they have the right to make just as much use, and just as many different kinds of uses, of the public library as their English-speaking fellow community members.

This holistic perspective stands in sharp contrast to the typical representations of immigrant library users and their relationships to public libraries. In her article, “The Role of Public Libraries in Community Building,” Rachel Scott (2011) states, in reference to immigrant communities: “It is our job as librarians to reach out to these community members and help them access the resources and information with which we can connect them” (p. 218). She refers to such resources to underscore how “libraries have played an important role in acculturating and educating recent immigrants” (Scott 2011:205). While libraries are a crucial space for immigrant populations to access necessary information, the emphases on a librarian’s duty and on the importance of immigrant acculturation seem to define immigrants primarily as a group that lacks knowledge. Although well-intentioned, the claim that libraries must “reach out” to immigrants,

because “education and acculturation make for good citizens” obscures the diverse forms of knowledge that immigrants carry with them (Scott 2011:201). When such knowledges are invited and acknowledged in the public library setting, they can enrich the public library environment and inspire deeper degrees of engagement among immigrant library visitors.

This proposed workshop seeks to follow that vision and to take it a step further through a unique focus on personal and collective well-being. Just as in other Spanish-language programs at Adriance Library, this series can encourage participants and facilitators to build trusting, horizontal relationships and to share resources and information. I also hope that, by providing a space for women that prioritizes enjoyment, well-being, and care for oneself and others, this workshop can inspire unique forms of togetherness and resistance. I imagine that the opening of a space for dialogue about complex topics can depart from the typical one-way models through which public libraries provide services to immigrants and other minoritized groups. Throughout my planning of these sessions, I have included opportunities for participants to share their own experiences and expertise regarding different areas of personal well-being. In Chapter Five, I will further explain the significance of a space in which the participants collectively create new forms of knowledge by sharing their lived experiences.

My interest in creating a space for dialogue and the exchange of experiences grew in part from my conversation with Jessica Sherman. She suggested that a space for open discussion could be beneficial for the core group of women who often attend Margarita’s programs because “they are hungry for mental stimulation and a sense of community.”⁸ She commented that it might be helpful for them to have a safe space for discussing the most pressing issues. Sherman

⁸ Sherman, Jessica. 2018. Interview by Isabel Schneck, Adriance Memorial Public Library, Poughkeepsie, NY, November 20.

also suggested that “self-help and self-care” might be particularly important topics for Latinas, who, “with all the expectations of modern parenting, just have so much to do.”⁹ I therefore aim for this workshop to function as a space for Spanish-speaking Latinas to build trust, to engage in dialogue with one another, and to collectively discover ways to center and improve their well-being in daily life.

⁹ Ibid.

Chapter Four

Reclaiming Wellness: The Personal and Political Dimensions of Well-Being

As suggested in my conversations with Margarita and with Jessica from Chapters Two and Three, I hope that the focus of *Crezcamos Juntas* on personal well-being can help participants to care for themselves in the face of stressors that demand their time and energy. Furthermore, I envision this workshop series as a space for Latinas to actively refute the mainstream messages about buzz words such as “wellness,” “self-love,” and “self-care.” In their representations of these topics, media sources tend to center the faces, voices, and lifestyles of young, wealthy white women in all their front pages and headlines, creating an association of personal well-being with whiteness and privilege. I hope that the women who join *Crezcamos Juntas* can take this program as an opportunity to refute such skewed portrayals and to create their own discourses and practices around personal well-being.

To be writing about well-being through a racialized lens creates some discomfort for me, as it should. It has been challenging for me to consider what it entails for me to become the white co-developer of a wellness space geared solely towards Latina women. My careful intentions for this workshop respond to the observations that Salma Haidrani makes in her (2016) article, “How the Wellness Movement Ostracizes Women of Color.” As Haidrani explains, low-income immigrant women, and women of color more generally, are often excluded from mainstream media conversations around wellness. Instead, these conversations are overtly aimed towards a white, wealthy, female audience. Despite the fact that plenty of women of color are actively engaging in wellness practices of the same nature as those in which white women engage (e.g. healthy eating, yoga, pilates, veganism, and spiritual practice), white female wellness figures disproportionately dominate and profit from the wellness industry. The perspectives and media

profiles of wellness specialists of color receive far less recognition from major media sources than those of white female bloggers.

Haidrani (2016) argues that this dominance and popularity of white wellness bloggers has little or nothing to do with whether they hold credentials as wellness “experts.” Rather, these figures have been successful because “they all possess the qualities that seem to matter most in the digital age: All are attractive, lithe, and – crucially – white. Essentially, they’re sending the message ‘cook like me, look like me’ – which works, as long as they’re speaking to an audience that already does (or at least can) look like them.” Drawing from her own experiences both in wellness spaces and online, Haidrani states the clear message that she gathered: “Women of color like me aren’t just invisible in health and wellness. We’re not welcome. Women’s health, it appears, is assumed to be the sole preserve of white women” (2016).

While mainstream media produce and disseminate images that equate wellness with whiteness, this pattern by no means implies that consumers of such media have no agency in the face of biased representations. It is crucial to keep in mind all of the people of color who actively resist such portrayals by creating and sharing their own health and wellness practices. Their perspectives and practices are invaluable models that I aim to adapt and incorporate to suit this workshop series. Towards this end, I have conducted my independent research on women’s well-being resources and workshop models almost exclusively in Spanish. Obviously, there are still many layers of relative privilege among the Spanish-speaking wellness leaders that I have encountered: for example, the majority of the sources that I came across were written by Spanish or Argentinian women who held professional degrees. However, I also found that conducting

this research in Spanish helped me to find examples of wellness leaders who have gained popularity among other Spanish-speakers.¹⁰

Reflections from Poughkeepsie community members speak to the importance of spaces that encourage women to center their well-being in daily life. In one conversation I had with a small business owner, referred to as Julia throughout this piece, she discussed a wide range of topics that were important to her daily life and well-being. At one point, she commented: “*Con todo el estrés, con trabajar tanto día y noche, creo que algunas personas nos envejecemos por dentro.*”¹¹ Julia’s statement arose from her reflection on many other issues she discussed from her own experience, including linguistic and institutional barriers, the struggle to find stability and community in the United States, and her constant efforts to manage the finances of both her business and her family.

Scholars have researched the relationships between forces of systemic oppression, stressors such as those that Julia described, and the mental and physical health of immigrant women. Their findings attest to the importance of a setting that encourages relationship-building and a focus on personal well-being for low-income immigrant women. Reiterating many of the challenges that Margarita and Julia identified, Delara (2016:4-6) illustrates how immigrant women face several intersecting strains on their mental health. Many of these factors stem from the impacts of systems of oppression, including: gender-based discrimination and violence, structural barriers to health care and mental health services, institutionalized, interpersonal, and internalized racism, inhumane workplace conditions, un/under-employment and low

¹⁰ As a matter of fact, I have learned about some of these key influencers through recommendations from the women who participate in Margarita’s programs at the library. It has therefore been important for me to check my assumptions that workshop participants will enter the space with no prior knowledge or experience around their care for their own well-being. Such assumptions directly contradict the primary intention of this workshop series: to center the knowledge and experiences that participants bring into the space with them.

¹¹ “With all the stress of working so much, day and night, I think some of us age on the inside.”

socioeconomic status, and the physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of the process of migration itself.

In addition to the combinations of these stressors, some researchers have also focused on family caregiving practices among low-income immigrant women and other women of color, bringing attention to mental and physical health patterns among some women who care for family members with illnesses or disabilities. In their study of caregivers of family members with dementia, Son et al. (2007) found that those caring for family members with significant behavioral problems tended to “rate their health more poorly, take poorer care of themselves, and spend more money on their health care” (p. 882). They also emphasized that, when caregivers feel “overloaded” with multiple roles to fulfill and severe challenges in caring for family members, they “may have less time and energy to take care of their own health” (Son et al. 2007:882). Other researchers have also investigated the relationship between chronic stress and specific health issues such as blood pressure, hypertension, coronary heart disease, and depression (King et al. 1994; Schulz et al. 1999; Lee et al. 2003; Robison et al. 2009).

In the case of Latina familial caregivers, gendered and cultural expectations around caring for family members may both ameliorate and intensify the impacts of caregiving on their physical and mental health. It is crucial to remember that every individual’s experience will differ, and that the physical and psychological strains of caregiving may also depend on an individual’s income level, age, and degrees of support from other family members, among other factors. However, Pharr et al. (2014) identify some important patterns that describe how gendered and cultural norms impact the experiences of African American, Latinx, Asian American, and European American caregivers. From their interviews, they concluded that African Americans, Latinxs, and Asian Americans described caregiving as “embedded” in their

“life experiences” and family practices, to a greater extent than did European American respondents (Pharr et al. 2014:3). Women in particular expressed that the caregiving role was expected of them by their families since their childhood and traced those expectations to cultural influences (Pharr et al. 2014:6).

In some cases, this understanding of caregiving as “natural” and firmly expected of them could lead caregivers to embrace their roles and take pride in their care for other family members. On the other hand, Pharr et al. (2014) also note: “The degree to which caregiving is culturally embedded and prescribed may preclude some caregivers from questioning the caregiving role and/or seeking support” (p. 6). Considering this potential tendency among Latinas with familial caregiving responsibilities, it becomes important to develop a workshop space that supports Latina women in prioritizing care for themselves.¹² As I will discuss further in Chapter Five, an environment that fosters social connections with other people in similar situations can support women in managing the stressors that may arise from caregiving and other responsibilities. To further this discussion on well-being and self-care practices among Latina caregivers, a case study of the workshop series, “*Mujer Cuídate Quiérete Valórate*,” will reveal the power that domestic workers found in redirecting some of their care towards themselves.

“*Mujer Cuídate Quiérete Valórate*” provides a strong example of a workshop series that addressed the intersections between developing one’s personal well-being and defending one’s rights as an immigrant, a woman, and a care worker.¹³ As described in a brief article about these

¹² Some of the women with whom Margarita and I spoke during the survey process also indicated that they work as employed caregivers for children and for elderly patients, which makes the challenges of managing multiple caregiving roles and responsibilities even more relevant to the case of *Crezcamos Juntas*. Some of the workshop participants may carry dual responsibilities to care for others both within and outside their immediately family.

¹³ The program was created and implemented in 2013 by the Spanish organization *Emigrad@s Sin Fronteras* and was geared towards Latin American immigrant domestic workers throughout the Basque region of Biscay in Spain.

workshops, the first part of the series focused on “*contenidos relacionados al autocuidado, técnicas de liberación emocional, auto gestión de tiempo libre y autoestima*,”¹⁴ while the second part incorporated strategies for the participants to bring those techniques into their daily lives. One of the sessions also focused on the women’s rights as domestic workers and as immigrants (Emigrad@s Sin Fronteras 2014).

Emigrad@s Sin Fronteras produced a video documentary in which participants spoke on how these workshops had impacted their relationships to their work and to themselves. Across their reflections, the women emphasized the power they found in taking charge of their free time and redirecting it towards themselves. Roxana Chambi explained that, while working with an elderly man 24 hours a day throughout the work week, “*Me olvidé de mi tiempo de descanso. Y yo no era dueña de mi permiso, o sea de mi tiempo muerto. Y con estos cursos que he pasado, ahora...lo tengo, lo utilizo, y me siento más tranquila*.”¹⁵ She added that she now has new habits that she had forgotten to establish before, like exercising regularly and connecting with her personality and self-esteem (Emigrad@s Sin Fronteras 2013).

In addition to this new sense of ownership and enjoyment of free time, participants also commented on the positive impacts of the yoga and mind-body meditation activities in which they had participated, the strength they felt when sharing a space with others, and the importance of learning about their rights as immigrants and as workers (Emigrad@s Sin Fronteras 2013). Their comments highlight that these seemingly different topics can and should be interwoven in a workshop series because, in their daily experiences, the participants had felt an acute need for

¹⁴ “topics related to self-care, techniques for emotional liberation, the management of one’s own free time and self-esteem.”

¹⁵ “I forgot about my break time. And I wasn’t the owner of my leaves from work, of my down time basically. And with these classes I’ve taken, now...I have it, I use it, and I feel more at ease.”

all of these forms of support simultaneously. I drew upon the holistic approach of “*Mujer Cuídate Quiérete Valórate*” and the reflections of participants in this program when planning the *Crezcamos Juntas* workshop series with Margarita. The four topics for the *Crezcamos Juntas* sessions – relaxation, nutrition, self-esteem, and fun – arose from conversations with Latinas in Poughkeepsie and with Margarita about the needs and interests of the community. In the following section, I will include a case study of another program as part of my discussion on collective knowledge construction, horizontal participation, and the emphasis on lived experiences.

Chapter Five

A Place to Speak and Be Heard: Collective Knowledge Construction

In prior chapters, I have alluded to the potential of the *Crezcamos Juntas* sessions as opportunities for the incorporation of participants' lived experiences and the collective construction of knowledge around well-being practices. I also hope that this emphasis on personal experience can encourage participants to feel comfortable in the workshop environment and to build trust with one another. Echoing the comments from Margarita, Jessica, and Julia, I envision this workshop as a space for participants to release some of the difficult emotions and moments they may be experiencing and to receive support from one another. This idea of release is what has prompted me to conceive of the workshop as a space for *desahogo*.¹⁶

In several of our conversations, Margarita emphasized that women need and deserve a space to gather, to reflect, and to speak and be heard by others. She mentioned that, in her experience, she had observed that men often meet up with other men to talk and *desfogarse*¹⁷ in places outside their homes. After meeting up with their friends, Margarita explained, men come home feeling calmer and more capable of addressing what's around them. Meanwhile, women often find themselves under immense amounts of pressure which constrain their abilities to spend time in mutually supportive environments with other women. Such pressure often stems from a gendered division of labor which assigns a disproportionate share of household and caregiving tasks to women, who, in many cases, additionally work outside of their homes. The cultural expectations that women perform a larger share of these tasks, as Latinx participants discussed in Pharr et al.'s (2014) study, can further compound those gendered responsibilities.

¹⁶ *Desahogo* can be understood as the act of getting everything off one's chest, as I suggest with the word "release." In some contexts, it might refer to expressing one's emotions without inhibition, or a cathartic release of mental and emotional burdens that brings relief.

¹⁷ Similar to *desahogo*, this verb could be understood as "to let off steam" or to release pent-up thoughts and emotions.

Nonetheless, Margarita has insisted that working women with caregiving obligations deserve time for themselves and spaces to engage with other women.

Research on immigrant women's mental health has indicated that the formation of social connections outside the familial structure can significantly benefit immigrant women's daily well-being. In response to the multitude of stressors that she describes (see Chapter Four, pp. 20-21), Delara (2016) notes that immigrant women can turn to close friendships as a coping strategy and a source of support. Social networks formed through participation in an organized group or program can also provide women with social roles that reinforce their sense of identity, belonging, and self-worth (Delara 2016:3-4). Delara's observations echo Margarita's comment on the importance of creating conditions for participants to build trust and community with one another through the *Crezcamos Juntas* program.

Rina Benmayor (1991) makes a similar observation in her reflections on the El Barrio Popular Education Program which she facilitated. Regarding the group dynamics that developed over time, she writes, "In this sense, we can say that the 'community' created by participants in the Program is as much if not more responsible for empowerment as the contributions of teachers, staff, and researchers" (Benmayor 1991:166-167). While the focus of *Crezcamos Juntas* on personal well-being is an important component of the workshop series, the creation of a sense of community is just as important, if not more so. Margarita and I have agreed that we need to incorporate activities and discussions that encourage participants to build trust and feel comfortable around one another. In turn, we hope to bring the concept of "collective well-being" to life in the workshop setting.

Towards this end of building community and collective well-being, Margarita and I developed the opening and closing routines for each session (see the "Workshop Plans" section,

beginning on p. 48). I suggested the “¿Cómo estás hoy?” opening check-in based on my positive experience engaging with this exercise in Vassar’s “Building Inclusive Communities” intensive.¹⁸ When I suggested this exercise to Margarita, she marveled at the idea because she anticipated that participants would develop their abilities to listen to and engage with themselves and others. We also agreed on the gratitude and self-esteem listing exercises because they could model routines that participants might find helpful in their lives beyond the workshop series. Finally, Margarita suggested the closing routines for the workshop sessions, in which participants share key points from the meeting that they want to apply to their daily lives, and then share details that they appreciate or admire about other participants.

This final group appreciations routine aligns with the goals that motivated the opening routines: the development of trust, respect, and a sense of community. Meanwhile, the 20 minutes of open discussion time are intended to encourage reflection on the group activities and a free-form exchange of ideas. In our final stage of workshop session planning, Margarita and I decided that she would also use the open discussion time to notify participants of the theme of the upcoming week and gather feedback from the group. She plans to list a few potential activities and discussion topics, based on the group activity options and resources that I developed for each session, and then take a vote or guide a conversation as to which activities and topics are of greatest interest to participants. Our addition of this group decision-making element helped me see that it is actually most useful for me to leave the plans open-ended by including a list of possible resources for each session. Most importantly, though, it reflects our

¹⁸ I was surprised by the unique sense of trust in others and the deep degree of personal reflection that emerged for me when I had five full minutes to share how I was doing with the same group members every class meeting. I also strengthened my listening skills and learned the power of listening to others without interruption or judgment.

commitment to ensuring that the workshop participants can take collective ownership of the space and steer the course of each session.

In my thinking about how to encourage community building and collective well-being through *Crezcamos Juntas*, I have drawn upon the approaches of the programs offered by *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (MUA), a member-based Latina immigrant organizing and empowerment organization active in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹⁹ The organization serves as a space for women to gather, to listen to one another, and to build leadership and solidarity when working on both personal challenges and widespread campaigns. A major element that helps to forge these bonds of solidarity is MUA's emphasis on the importance of lived experiences and of learning from one another. In an informational article about MUA, Ochoa (2018) writes:

*En MUA las mujeres utilizan sus historias, sus testimonios, sus voces, como un acto político. Además de realizar talleres informativos, que abarcan una diversidad de temas como salud mental, autocuidado, estrés, violencia doméstica, también dan el espacio para que las participantes puedan compartir sus vivencias. De manera mensual se lleva a cabo una reunión sin ningún tema asignado, llamada 'de desahogo,' con el objetivo de que las miembros compartan sus sentimientos e ideas sobre situaciones que están atravesando.*²⁰

This summary of MUA's work highlights the organization's simultaneous emphases on the personal experiences of participants, the need for general *desahogo* and mutual support, and the power of informational workshops that focus in on certain topics shared across women's experiences.

¹⁹ MUA works on many issues, but is particularly focused on supporting women facing domestic violence. In the organization's informational video, co-director Juana Flores explained that MUA does not outwardly identify itself as a domestic violence organization, because women may not feel comfortable entering such a space, especially if they have not come to define their current situation as one of domestic violence (MUA 2016).

²⁰ "At MUA the women use their stories, their testimonies, their voices, as a political act. In addition to running informational workshops that address a wide range of themes such as mental health, self-care, stress, domestic violence, they also offer a space for the participants to be able to share their lived experiences. Every month they hold a meeting without any assigned topic, titled '*de desahogo*' (meeting for release, decompression, processing), with the objective that members will share their feelings and ideas about situations that they're going through."

In the case of *Crezcamos Juntas*, Margarita and I acknowledged that there needed to be a balance between providing specific activities with which participants could engage and allowing a space for open, participant-led discussion. In one conversation, Margarita expressed that she did not want the workshop to transform into a “*club de amigas*”²¹ in which people simply discussed their personal experiences without focusing on any topics that could bring people together. In referring back to MUA’s work, I therefore have aimed to conceive of this space as a “middle ground” that functions neither entirely as the “*taller informativo*” nor the “*reunión de desahogo*” described in the case of MUA. Rather, *Crezcamos Juntas* can encourage participants to teach and learn from one another, both through their discussions of lived experiences and their engagement with structured activities.

This vision of collective learning shares key connections with the writings of several scholars, in which they emphasize the power and potential of spaces that encourage horizontal relationships and collective knowledge construction. In her analysis of the El Barrio Program, Benmayor (1991) writes:

The underlying premise in the Program is that personal experience serves as a critical basis for knowledge and skill acquisition...This learning environment is both exciting and challenging, since it establishes a space in which participants are experts. “Testimonial” speech acts help foster strong peer identification, bonding and a sense of collective. At the same time, this classroom atmosphere provides a validating framework for participants to “tell” their stories. (Pp. 161-162)

Taken together with the MUA case study, Benmayor’s comments reinforce the power of honoring the personal experiences of participants as key sources of knowledge and personal and collective reflection. Additionally, her perspective on “a space in which participants are experts” has driven my thinking about the development of *Crezcamos Juntas* as well as my own role in this research and planning process.

²¹ A [female] “friends’ club,” connoting, in part, that the group gathers to gossip.

Central to this discussion of power and expertise is the work and philosophy of Brazilian educator and researcher Paulo Freire. In his pedagogical models, Freire (1974:40) describes the importance of dialogue in fostering horizontal relationships within educational programs. He contrasts this model of horizontal dialogue with what he terms “anti-dialogue,” a method that stratifies one group over the other, implies a one-sided transmission of knowledge from the superior (“expert”) group to the inferior one, and breaks ties of empathetic communication (Freire 1974:41). Freire posits that the subversion and democratization of these power relationships can encourage participants to become more aware of their own agency and their place in the world. He refers to this awareness as “critical consciousness” (Freire 1974:39). Freire’s writings communicate the importance of using topics and methods that subvert the traditional power relationships between workshop facilitators and participants, so as to create a learning environment that inspires critical consciousness for both groups alike.

Building on Freire’s theory and pedagogy, Richa Nagar (2006) also writes about the significance of critically examining and redefining associations with “experts” and “expertise.” Nagar (2006) describes how her collaborative work with grassroots activists on the book *Playing with Fire* “made me reflect on the extent to which I had internalized the very definitions of ‘expert’ that I was ostensibly interested in dismantling through collaboration” (p. xl). It has therefore been important for me to remember that my vision of positioning community members as experts also requires consistent work on my end. I have worked to interrogate and redefine the assumptions that could lead me to position myself as an “expert” in this workshop development process. My collaboration with Margarita has proved crucial towards this change in my thinking.

Chapter Six: Positionality Statement

Throughout this piece and, particularly in the methods section that follows, I describe several challenging questions and moments that I have faced during this project due to my position of privilege. There are multiple aspects of my identity that impact how I relate to this project itself, to Margarita, and to the women for whom the workshop is intended. My identity as a white, upper-middle class, cisgender woman born in the United States and raised in a well-resourced New York City neighborhood designates me as one of the more privileged students at Vassar College. Those of us who hold this position also form the overwhelming majority of the Vassar student body. In the greater Poughkeepsie area, I have perceived that my status as a Vassar College student often raises a barrier between myself and Poughkeepsie residents. From what I understand, this division arises due to the geographic and economic segregation of Vassar's campus from "the rest of" Poughkeepsie, and also because many Poughkeepsie residents have not attained a college education and face interlocking forms of structural oppression that neither I nor my family have experienced.

Although I see this project and my previous work in the Poughkeepsie public schools as sincere efforts to chip away at that identity-based boundary, I have had to remember that some elements of the boundary will always remain there. I have learned that these permanent differences in the situated identities and lived experiences of myself and of Poughkeepsie residents should not transform into a source of guilt, nor as the fuel for a white savior complex. Despite my consistent efforts to resist both of these extremes, I have often felt that my own internal conflicts about this boundary have pulled me into a state of inertia or feeling "stuck" in critical deliberation. My extensive reflection on the ethics of this project and my relationships

with Latinxs in Poughkeepsie have at times made it difficult for me to continue moving forward and to commit to one course of action.

As I have worked to navigate these challenges and to stay active and engaged in my project, some frameworks have proved immensely helpful and inspiring to me. Leela Fernandes' (2003) chapter on "Knowledge" in *Transforming Feminist Practice* serves as one of these guiding method texts for my project. The entire chapter is worth citing, but I have found her discussion of "knowledge as an ethical practice" and her definition of the process of witnessing to be particularly helpful to my project. Fernandes (2003) writes: "To consider knowledge as an ethical practice is to recognize and accept the power-laden relationships that permeate it without being ultimately trapped by these relationships of power" (p. 83). Regarding the role of the witness, Fernandes (2003) explains: "The witness fundamentally differs from the objective observer/scholar because the witness consciously accepts both the power-laden relationship and the ethical responsibility of the act of witnessing" (p. 83).

The effort to position myself as a witness in this project has been most directly related to my interactions with Margarita and with Latinx library visitors and community members. However, I also consider that this acceptance of "both the power-laden relationship and the ethical responsibility" of witnessing extends into my independent research and planning of the workshop series. When I have felt unsure of how to proceed, I have returned to Fernandes' (2003) insistence that witnesses can accept the power dynamics and ethical tensions of their work with participants from marginalized backgrounds, without getting stuck in deliberations over such dynamics and tensions.

Finally, it has been important for me to remember that, as a witness, I aim to take this project as an opportunity to further my own learning. In other words, I must position myself as a

learner and not as an expert. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my planning of a space for horizontal participation requires that I reject traditional academic definitions of an “expert” and therefore reject my desire to fill this role. Fernandes (2003) encapsulates these ideas when she writes that witnessing “suggests a frightening possibility that those of us who claim to be the knowers are in fact the ones being taught” (p. 93). I have returned to Fernandes’ (2003) writings, Nagar and the Sangtin Writers’ (2006) *Playing with Fire*, and other key methods texts to guide my navigation of this project and my role within it.

Chapter Seven: Methods, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

FRAMING INTENTIONS THROUGH KEY SOURCES

As mentioned in the first chapter of this text, my project grew out of a desire to collaborate with Margarita so that we could co-create a product that would simultaneously support my senior project, Margarita's work at Adriance Memorial Public Library, and Latinas in Poughkeepsie. In this vein of reciprocity and collaboration, I have envisioned the workshop space as one of trust, community, and collective knowledge production. I have also sought for this to be a sustainable project, in that Margarita could utilize the workshop plans that we co-develop at any point in the future, whether I am in Poughkeepsie or not. Likewise, this vision of sustainability applies for participants' relationships to the workshop: I hope that this series can encourage participants to collectively develop tools and ways of thinking that will help them center their well-being in day-to-day life.

These intentions for my project relate closely to the ways in which Rina Benmayor (1991) describes her team's objectives for the El Barrio Popular Education Program. She writes, "the hope is to create a lasting institution that responds to ongoing community needs, and not one that exists merely for the purpose of research" (Benmayor 1991:170). Benmayor (1991) further argues that "research has an obligation to create social spaces in which people can make meaningful contributions to their own well-being and not serve as objects of investigation" (p. 160). Similar to Benmayor's objectives for the El Barrio program, I imagined this project as one that would align with my interests and fulfill the senior project criteria but would also be engaging for participants and useful to Margarita in her programming work in the future.

I have drawn upon several scholars' reflections on how spaces created outside the university can begin to subvert the traditional power relationships between the "researchers" and

the “researched.” While her analysis frankly encompasses a far more powerful critique of the university as a settler institution, and demands much more transformative solutions than does my own project, I have found it useful to look to the following paradigm shifts that Sandy Grande (2018) calls for among radical academics in *Refusing the University*:

First and foremost, we need to commit to collectivity—to staging a refusal of the individualist promise project of the settler university...Second, we must *commit to reciprocity*—the kind that is primarily about being answerable to those communities we claim as our own and those we claim to serve...perhaps one of the most radical refusals we can authorize is to work together as one. (Pp. 183-184; emphasis in original)

Like Grande, I have been drawn to this effort to be accountable to people outside the boundaries of Vassar and to engage with Margarita and with other community members as co-creators of a sustainable project. However, I have found that such a process and vision are more difficult to implement than I had imagined, for reasons that I will describe in the sections that follow.

THE SURVEY PROCESS

In October, Margarita and I worked together to create a survey that would assess both the degrees of interaction with Adriance Library and the topics of interest for workshop sessions among Latinas in Poughkeepsie and at the library. The idea behind this survey echoed the intentions that I established in the previous subsection. Margarita and I imagined that it would benefit both the library’s outreach efforts with the Poughkeepsie Latinx community and would support my research towards my project. Throughout the period in which Margarita and I attempted to carry out the survey, logistical challenges arose, from which I learned some key things to keep in mind when conducting research with people.

Initially, Margarita and I had agreed that it would be helpful to conduct the survey at a community center or school, so as to ensure multiple responses and to establish a link to a space that was already familiar to people. For example, we considered distributing the surveys at an

English class at the Family Partnership Center or conducting them during dismissal at a nearby school. However, when I contacted staff for permission to conduct surveys in these places, I received no response after several attempts to reach them. This challenge revealed that complications often arise when one attempts to conduct research at public centers or institutions, due to security restrictions and the difficulty of communication with employees to receive authorization.

In response to these considerations, Margarita and I met up at the end of October to carry out surveys in several public spaces near the library, including a park, two supermarkets, and the area surrounding a nearby elementary school. Because we had not received a reply from the principal of the school, we stationed ourselves a few blocks from the school entrance, near the park where we had previously attempted to conduct the surveys. I found that it was helpful to have Margarita with me that day because some people recognized her from the times that they had visited the library and might have felt more trust through that familiarity. Margarita is also far more experienced than I am when it comes to outreach with Latinx community members in Poughkeepsie, so I observed and attempted to emulate the ease with which she engaged in conversation with the people she surveyed.

However, after more than three hours attempting to complete the surveys, we only gathered four complete responses. A main reason for the difficulty of obtaining responses likely involves the conditions of where and when we were attempting to conduct the survey. When people were entering or leaving the supermarket, or on the way to pick up their children from school, they were generally in a hurry and told us they did not have time to answer any questions. In these situations, it was helpful that we had small flyers on-hand with the schedule of Spanish-language programs and Margarita's contact information. The flyers also helped us

give people something tangible that would attract their attention and reassure them that we were not simply claiming to work at the library. The importance of establishing some trust and legitimacy with community members returns to my prior discussion of the reluctance among some immigrants to provide information, even anonymously, to representatives of public institutions (see Chapter Two, pp. 11-12).

After the first day of outreach with Margarita, I conducted the rest of the surveys alone and found it more challenging. Once again, it was difficult to find spaces where people had the time to respond to the questions. I also struggled to carry out the surveys when I no longer had copies of the library flyers on-hand to start a conversation or legitimize that I worked with a library employee. A central factor that I feel the need to reflect upon here is my identity as a white college student and, consequently, the ways in which Latinx Poughkeepsie residents might perceive me, and vice versa. To stand on the sidewalk and attempt to walk up to people in a non-threatening manner proved very uncomfortable and challenging, and my consciousness of my own identity as a white researcher made me even more hesitate to approach people. I often worried that I was intruding on people's time or making people uncomfortable. While I cannot know how the various people with whom I attempted to speak may have perceived me, it is likely that my appearance as white, combined with my fluency in Spanish, caused some apprehension among Latinx Poughkeepsie residents.

As I mentioned, some of the people whom Margarita and I met on our survey day recognized Margarita from the library or from her appearances in local Spanish-language news sources. Although this is only my perception, it seemed that people were more at ease and willing to converse with Margarita than with me. Such familiarity was, in some cases, due to her prior work at the library, but it is possible that survey respondents also perceived Margarita as

belonging to the same ethnic group and generation as themselves, a perception that could not be the case for me. Such differences in my identity need not be seen as obstacles that rendered the survey effort completely futile: I was able to gather some surveys and engaged in several in-depth conversations with people. However, it is still crucial to remember that my position as a white Vassar student – regardless of my language abilities, cultural responsiveness, or intentions – will undoubtedly impact how people of color in Poughkeepsie, including Margarita, perceive and relate to me.

Finally, conducting the surveys on my own also meant that I reached fewer people in a given amount of time than if Margarita and I had taken on this effort together. I was able to complete three surveys on my own. In addition to these, Margarita and I received a total of 16 incomplete responses from people who either had never heard of the library or had heard of it but had never visited. In hindsight, it would still have been worthwhile to ask people who had never heard of the library about what topics would most interest them for a workshop series. However, many of the people who responded that they had not heard of and/or visited the library were also in a hurry when Margarita or I attempted to speak with them.

In total, we received 15 complete survey responses. This total includes six people whom we surveyed during a cooking class at the library, two people whose children had participated in the Spanish Spelling Bee, and the seven people whom we surveyed at random in public areas. Through conversations with my advisors, I realized that the quantity of people we ultimately surveyed was not of such great importance because each individual response indicated a different set of priorities and needs. However, some trends did emerge across the survey responses. For example, three topics received nine or more votes: classes to learn a skill or trade (*oficio*);

workshops on personal well-being; and English classes.²² At the same time, I have come to realize that people's responses to the survey were likely influenced by several factors, including their relationships to the library and the phrasing or amount of information I gave when asking each question or presenting each workshop topic. I have therefore considered the survey responses as a general guide to people's interests and degrees of familiarity with the library. I have been careful not to assign too much weight to individual responses when choosing a workshop topic.

During one of our conversations about the focus of the workshop series, Margarita mentioned that I ultimately needed to choose a topic that interested me and that I could manage to plan with the knowledge and resources I have. It has been helpful and necessary for me to keep this point in mind and to maintain some focus on my own intentions and abilities. While I have been aiming to create a product that is relevant and useful for community members, I have also had to remind myself to exert some authority over my project and to make sure that it fits my interests and objectives.

Margarita highlighted that, even if respondents had chosen one or two workshop topics that most interested them, such responses do not necessarily indicate that people would find no use in other options besides the topics they chose. She compared the proposal of this workshop to the listing of a job opportunity, in that it makes the most sense to create the opportunity and then see which candidates consider it to be relevant to their experiences. We also discussed that we could not know for sure whether any of the people who completed the survey would attend the workshop in the future. It is therefore important to look to the survey responses as general indicators of people's interests, but the responses should not be considered as the only basis for

²² The English classes were not listed as an option for respondents to vote for on the survey. Participants suggested of their own accord that English classes would be beneficial to them.

the decision of a workshop topic. These considerations helped me select personal and collective well-being as the topic of the workshop series.

Finally, a key realization from this survey process is that I have learned so much more about people and their interests and needs through spontaneous, open-ended conversations than through the structured survey questions alone. For example, when out of curiosity I walked into Julia's small business, she and I ended up speaking for over two hours despite having never met before. We shared several stories about both of our experiences, and Julia's reflections ended up guiding some of my planning of this workshop series.²³ My conversation with Julia felt transformative because I realized that I learned far more from simply listening to her and leaving the conversation open than from asking her upfront what her needs and interests were, as I had done through the survey previously.

On the one hand, I would recommend that students who conduct similar research opt for this unstructured and conversational approach to research and survey collection. However, a key challenge remains: Most people do not have the free time necessary to engage in such a lengthy, detailed, and at times meandering conversation. Low-income immigrant women, with the multiple interconnected situations that demand their time, labor, and energy, may find themselves with even less free time to engage in such discussions. The circumstances of my conversation with Julia happened to allow us to converse with no rush imposed on our time; however, when I attempted to conduct surveys in front of supermarkets and in areas near school buildings, I easily saw how impractical and unreasonable it would be to ask people to spare more than the ten minutes it already takes to complete the survey. A main challenge I have faced

²³ More specifically, Julia's suggestions from one of our conversations influenced me to incorporate the workshop session centered around fun. She described how uplifting it felt for her to travel to a park near the Hudson River and to enjoy the natural landscape there. Julia suggested that the workshop series could enable women to travel safely together, when they otherwise might struggle to access transportation or fear for their safety when traveling alone.

during my project is therefore the question of how to create conditions that allow for more fluid, unstructured conversations. This process might entail finding spaces and moments that resemble the circumstances of my conversation with Julia, as well as finding ways to establish trust and active listening when the conversation can only take a very short amount of time.

NEGOTIATING COLLABORATION

For students who may engage in similar collaborative community-based projects, I think it is important for me to mention that collaborating with someone with a different schedule and different set of commitments was more difficult than I had imagined it would be. Margarita and I get along naturally, and we develop wonderful ideas whenever we sit down and talk together. However, as great of a team as we are, we still entered a long phase during this project in which our communication lulled. This stage left me feeling hopeless and confused about my project. Margarita had warned me that she was going to be extremely busy throughout the month of November, but, in addition to those circumstances, a series of unexpected obstacles emerged for both of us and continued into the winter break: family emergencies, illness, urgent appointments and meetings, and so on. These obstacles hindered much of our communication and presented a major challenge for me in my planning process, as I had rested so much of this project on a spirit of collaboration and frequent communication.

Margarita and I were finally able to meet and discuss the project in February. Until that point, I had found it challenging and disappointing whenever I tried to contact Margarita and she was too busy to meet or was dealing with the unanticipated issues that I mentioned above. I became hesitant to reach out to her because I worried that I was asking too much from her, yet I also felt unsure as to how to continue with a project that I had envisioned as collaborative from its start to its finish. I felt stuck during those three months and struggled to make progress in the

workshop plans and in my writing because I felt discouraged. I tell this story to communicate to future students that the collaborative process is not easy, and that it is crucial that student researchers-collaborators find a balance between working with someone else and working alone. I recognize that my hopes for this project came from a place of positive intentions: I wanted to make the process as collaborative as possible so that Margarita and I could contribute equally to the planning of the program. I hoped that this equitable participation would then make it easy for Margarita to feel confident in implementing something that had grown from many of her ideas as well as mine. However, the way that I imagined our collaboration did not end up being particularly convenient for Margarita, as she could not direct much of her time, attention and energy to my senior project.

In this vein, some of the challenges that arose in my collaboration with Margarita may have resulted from a lack of clear communication between us regarding the extent to which this project could reasonably be considered Margarita's responsibility. As I described at the beginning of this piece, I had initially envisioned an idealized form of collaboration between us, including regular meetings and frequent exchanges of ideas. I expected to be able to turn to Margarita with any questions about the various steps involved in this project. However, I now see that I rested some of my expectations on an assumption that she would have more free time to meet and would place this project as one of her priorities.

I have no doubt that, given the choice and ability to do so, Margarita would be happy to prioritize this project. Our conversations about the workshop have never failed to spark excitement and inspiration in both of us. Yet I have also realized that, at times, I may have confused Margarita's role in this collaboration with one more similar to that of a thesis advisor. Such a realization has helped me to refocus my intentions on the clarity of my communication

with Margarita instead of insisting on frequent communication. In the final few months of this project, I have made a clearer effort to ask Margarita how she would prefer to collaborate and what she anticipates her schedule will allow. I have been learning the overdue lesson that, as a full-time library employee and a human being, Margarita has so many situations and programs to manage on a daily basis, and a different collaborative structure would better benefit both of us.

Related to this point, it has been crucial for me to realize that an equitable and reciprocal co-creator relationship can take many forms besides that which I had initially envisioned for our collaboration. There is no one correct way to collaborate, nor is there a singular definition of equitable contribution to a project. In many cases, collaboration entails combining different skills and experiences that the co-creators bring to a project. Richa Nagar and the Sangtin Writers' (2006) insights have guided me in remaining flexible to the multiple ways that people can relate to one another and develop their collaborations over time. In the section of *Playing with Fire* titled "Confronting Hierarchy in Alliance: The Politics of 'Skills,'" Nagar explores the doubts and challenges that she faced as a United States-based academic collaborating with a diverse group of women directly involved in grassroots organizing in Uttar Pradesh, India. Nagar's academic background positioned her as the co-author charged with documenting the group's collective writing process, a position that caused her some anxieties throughout the development of the project. Regarding her concerns and the Sangtin Writers' responses to them, she writes:

Whenever I became anxious about how this division of labor gave me the power to represent the collective and this journey, the group tried to allay my concerns by reminding me that forming an alliance was primarily about strategically combining, not replicating, our complementary skills. (Nagar 2006:xxxix)

In the case of the development of *Crezcamos Juntas*, Margarita and I seem to find ourselves in a similar relationship to this one. The clearest similarity is that I hold the more traditionally academic role of conducting scholarly research around this topic and justifying the

project in writing, while Margarita will be in charge of implementing the program, using her expertise in logistics and in building relationships with workshop participants. However, Nagar's reflection can also apply to several other aspects of Margarita's and my respective positions and our relationships to this project. Throughout our collaborative process, I became more aware of the fact that Margarita and I each have different sets of priorities and different ways in which we need to use our time.

Given that the plans for these workshop series would serve to fulfill my senior project, my schedule allowed me considerable time to work on the session plans and all the research that contributed to such planning. I also found myself with plenty of free time to meet with Margarita, but this was not the case on her end. Margarita explained to me that, as a full-time employee at Adriance Library, she had far more priorities to address and less control over her schedule. It therefore makes sense why she had less time to meet and could not dedicate as much of her attention to every detail of the workshop planning. I inferred that she viewed this project as one tentative program of several other programs that she already works on at the library.

While the differences between Margarita's and my respective relationships to this project at times proved challenging, there was also a sense of balance that emerged from our collaboration and from the differences in our points of view. My thinking about the possible directions for *Crezcamos Juntas* emerged from my interactions with theoretical texts and my conversations with professors. These influences led my visions for this project to become more grounded in theory and intentions than in the feasibility of the workshop itself. On the other hand, Margarita drew her insights for this program from her prior experiences facilitating workshops at Adriance Library. Her perspective was more directly oriented towards the

environment and constraints of the library itself and the feasibility of different aspects of the *Crezcamos Juntas* plans.

I found it helpful to balance the practical factors that Margarita would highlight in our conversations with the more imaginative suggestions I received from Vassar faculty. As Margarita described during one of our phone conversations, “*Lo que piensan y lo que te sugieren tus asesoras no está mal, sólo es que yo estoy pensando siempre en la biblioteca. Y como vamos a realizar este programa en la biblioteca, te estoy dando mi perspectiva de lo que realmente es factible aquí y ahora. Mi punto de vista es más específico, el de ellas es más general.*”²⁴ I realized that I could scale back some of my imaginations for this workshop session without discarding those creative ideas altogether. As Margarita mentioned, we can plan what one series will look like while keeping in mind what ideas we might implement in a future workshop series. Such perspectives on the potential relevance of feedback to future workshops are what prompted me to add the final section of this piece, “Looking Forward: Community Feedback and Ideas for Future Programs.”

During the planning process, Margarita has also been able to imagine how different aspects of the workshop might be received by those who attended. For example, she suggested that we hold only four workshop sessions plus one closing meeting, instead of holding six total sessions, because a commitment of five weeks would likely seem more manageable to participants than would a six-week commitment. Margarita also knew that participants would need and appreciate several opportunities to converse openly one another, and her suggestions inspired me to develop the opening conversation exercises now included in the workshop plans.

²⁴ “What your advisors think and suggest to you isn’t bad, it’s just that I’m always thinking about the library. And since we’re going to carry out this program at the library, I’m giving you my perspective of what’s really feasible here and now. My point of view is more specific, theirs is more general.”

These are just two of multiple examples in which I noticed that Margarita could more clearly envision possible outcomes of the workshop series based on her prior experiences. Her insights into potential outcomes were a huge support that I greatly appreciated throughout our collaboration.

These reflections on the benefits of differing points of view connect back to Richa Nagar's (2006) comments on the "strategic combination" of skills among her project's co-authors (p. xxxix). This collaboration represented a challenging, at times frustrating learning process for me, through which Margarita and I worked to find a balance between our differing perspectives, priorities, and resources that we could dedicate to this project. The challenges I faced in this collaborative process also revealed the importance of embracing spontaneous action and trusting my thinking and writing processes. The final sub-section will summarize these lessons and my process of learning them.

EMBRACING SPONTANEITY AND TRUSTING MY PROCESS

At several points in the development of this project, I have found a sense of direction in moments that I had not anticipated. These unexpected revelations came about under two main circumstances: when I engaged in a completely spontaneous conversation or trail of research; and when I gave up on trying to achieve a perfect outcome and simply allowed my thoughts to transport themselves onto paper. Through the toughest tribulations, this project taught me new lessons about my creative process which I had never realized before. I learned to trust my instincts, to open my mind and put anything I was thinking onto paper. As soon as I let my ideas leave my mind and appear on the page, I realized that I had already given far more thought to the project than I had previously been aware of. I learned to trust in my own ideas and to take risks. By entering different stores and other spaces in downtown Poughkeepsie, I engaged in

conversations with people whom I'd never met. The ideas that emerged from these spontaneous interactions have informed key aspects of the workshop series. Moreover, by taking risks and letting my thoughts flow, I learned how to keep moving in any way I could, even when I could not share my ideas with Margarita or feel connected to our collaborative part of the project.

Workshop Plans

General Workshop Schedule and Routines

Opening Routine: *Listas de Gratitud y Autoestima (15 minutes)*

(5 minutes) – Everyone serves herself a snack/tea/coffee.

(5 minutes) – Write, draw, or think about:

- *¿De qué te sientes agradecida hoy?*
- *Intenta enumerar un mínimo de tres cosas, ientre más ideas, mejor! Deben ser distintas a las que anotaste en sesiones previas.²⁵*

(5 minutes) – Write, draw, or think about:

- *¿Cual(es) son unos aspectos que aprecias y que te gustan de ti misma? O pueden ser acciones que hiciste (por ti y/o por alguien más) que te hicieron sentir contenta con ti misma.*
- *Intenta enumerar un mínimo de tres cosas, ientre más ideas, mejor! Deben ser distintas a las que anotaste en sesiones previas.²⁶*

**For each activity, participants should keep a running list that they either leave in the space or bring with them to each meeting. This way, their lists of gratitude and self-esteem items grow every time.

Opening Routine: *Share from lists (10 minutes)*

Share gratitude and self-esteem notes as a group. Each person can share one item from her gratitude list, then one from her self-esteem list, or more items.

Opening Routine: *¿Cómo estás hoy? (15 minutes)*

The group breaks up into pairs or groups of three. Ideally, the pairs or trios would consist of the same people in each session, to build more trust and intimacy.

- *Cada persona toma cinco minutos para describir cómo está hoy. Las otras compañera(s) no deben hablar mientras aquella persona comparte. Tampoco*

²⁵ “What do you feel grateful for today? Try to list at least three things, the more ideas, the better! They should be new ideas, not the same ones as in the previous session.” (I have chosen to write the instructions and discussion questions that will be addressed to the group in Spanish, so that it can be easier to use the workshop plans when giving these prompts and instructions directly to the group).

²⁶ “What are some aspect(s) that you like and appreciate about yourself? They could also be actions that you did (for yourself and/or for someone else) that made you feel content with yourself. Try to list at least three things, the more ideas, the better! They should be new ideas, not the same ones as in the previous session.”

*deben responder cuando haya terminado de compartir. Sólo la escuchan atentamente.*²⁷

****Each group should use a timer or watch the clock to make sure each person gets the same amount of time to share.**

Group Activity (50 minutes total)

The group engages in one or multiple activities related to that day's area of well-being, drawing upon the resources that I list under each heading, and based on the group consensus from the previous session.

****In one of our conversations, Margarita commented that it would be most helpful if I included several possible resources that she could draw upon for each session. There are unique benefits that would have come from inviting a wellness professional to share their insights in these sessions, but for now, I have decided simply to include websites and YouTube videos. I have made this decision because the workshop participants could access these resources at any point, for free, outside the workshop setting. My hope is that the ease of access to these internet resources can make it easier for participants to take the topics and perspectives from this workshop into their own hands. I continue this discussion in the footnote in the "Looking Forward" section that follows the workshop plans.**

Reflection, Feedback and Closing (30 minutes)

Reflecting as a whole group, each person shares: (20 minutes)

- *¿Qué aprendiste hoy? ¿Hay algunas prácticas, ideas o perspectivas que quisieras aplicar a tu vida diaria?*²⁸

Feedback for next week's session: (5 minutes)

- The facilitator (Margarita) informs the group of next week's theme and summarizes the topics or activities that the group could engage with in that session. Participants vote (perhaps in form of conversation) on which option(s) interest them the most.

****Depending on how much time I noted that each activity or discussion might take, there could be room to incorporate multiple activities and topics that were of greatest interest to participants.**

Group appreciations: (5 minutes)

- *Comparte algo que te gusta, que admiras o aprecias de la persona a tu derecha. Puede ser una cualidad suya, una habilidad que tiene, o algo que dijo o hizo durante el taller que apreciaste.*²⁹

²⁷ Each person takes five minutes to describe how she is doing today. The other group member(s) should not speak while that person is sharing, nor should they respond once she's finished sharing. They simply listen attentively.

²⁸ "What did you learn today? Are there any practices, ideas or perspectives that you'd like to apply in your daily life?"

²⁹ "Share something that you like, admire or appreciate about the person to your right. It could be one of her qualities, a skill of hers, or something that she said or did during the workshop, that you appreciated."

SESSION ONE: RELAXATION**Opening Routine: Listas de Gratitud y Autoestima (15 minutes)****Opening Routine: Sharing (10 minutes)****Opening Routine: ¿Cómo estás hoy? (15 minutes)****Group Activity Options: (50 minutes total)**

- [Deep breathing exercises](#) (choose some to try as a group – 10 minutes)
- Exercises to relieve tension – options:
 - [Exercises for head/neck pain](#) (4 minutes)
 - [Self-massage exercises for neck and connected areas](#) (10 minutes)
 - [Stretching for neck & back pain](#) (more movement – 10 mins.)
- Yoga
 - [10 minute video](#) (start at 0:45)
 - [20 minute video](#)
- ASMR
 - Brief explanation of what is ASMR: [0:28 - 1:30](#) or [2 minute video](#)
 - [Satisfying sounds video](#) (20 mins, can just play one part of it)
 - [5 minute soap carving video](#)
 - [ASMR en español](#) (30 mins, can play one part of it)
- Progressive muscle relaxation
 - [Script to read aloud](#) (pp. 9-15 for basic muscle relaxation)
 - Or, if Margarita/the group prefers to use a video:
 - [20 minute video](#) ; [15 minute video](#) ; [10 minute video](#)
- Meditation
 - [28 minute video](#) (this one could replace the progressive muscle relaxation)
 - [18 minute video](#) (visualization to attract what you wish for; play at 0.75 speed under “settings”)
 - [10 minute video](#) (visualization of forest and sea)
 - [10 minute video](#) (inner peace, visualization)

Reflection, Feedback and Closing (30 minutes)

SESSION TWO: FOOD/Nutrition**Opening Routine: Listas de Gratitud y Autoestima (15 minutes)****Opening Routine: Sharing (10 minutes)****Opening Routine: ¿Cómo estás hoy? (15 minutes)****Group Activity Options: (50 minutes total)**

- Watch a cooking video by a Latina chef (15-30 minutes)
 - [MarisolPink](#)
 - [Cocina vegan fácil](#)
 - [Pati's Mexican table](#) (available on Amazon prime TV)
 - [Mi Mero Mole recipe videos](#)
- Cook a recipe together: (20-50 minutes)
 - [Mi Mero Mole blog](#) (recipes and information about veganism)
 - [Pati's Mexican table](#) (select "serie TV & recetas" and choose a season to view the recipes by episode)
 - [KiwiLimon](#)
- Watch a video about nutrition
 - [Smoothie recipes \(8 mins\)](#)
 - [Adrian Yepez Fitness \(7 mins\)](#)
 - [Nutricionista - Foods to reverse diabetes \(9 mins\)](#)
- Some ideas for group discussion: (instead of/after a recipe or video)
 - *Comparte un recuerdo especial que tenga que ver con la comida.*
 - *¿Hay alimentos que te hacen sentir energizada, refrescada, bien?*
 - *¿Hay alimentos que te hacen sentir inflada, cansada, mal?³⁰*

**If the group prefers to cook something a bit more complex instead of watching a video, the recipe could take the full 50 minutes. They could also watch a cooking video and then make that same recipe, if it's a small and easy dish.

**Participants could also bring in recipes to share in this session. Margarita could let people know about this option in the previous session. If someone comes up with a recipe that lots of people are interested in, she could send Margarita the ingredients before this session and the group could cook that recipe together.

Reflection, Feedback and Closing (30 minutes)

³⁰ "Share a special memory you have that involves food. Are there foods that make you feel energized, refreshed, good? Are there foods that make you feel bloated, tired, bad?"

SESSION THREE: SELF-ESTEEM

Opening Routine: Listas de Gratitud y Autoestima (15 minutes)

Opening Routine: Sharing (10 minutes)

Opening Routine: ¿Cómo estás hoy? (15 minutes)

Group Activity Options: (50 minutes total)

- Participants make three lists: qualities they love about themselves, qualities that others admire about them, and positive moments in which they saw their own strengths. (20 minutes) Then share in pairs and reflect on the process of making the lists. (15 minutes)
 - [Link to instructions for this activity](#)
- Videos on building self-esteem:
 - [Pilar Sordo - 9 minute video](#) (and other videos on her channel)
 - [TED Talk on inner dialogue \(20 mins\)](#)
 - [TED Talk - motivational speech on facing fears \(12 mins\)](#)
- Stories of inspiring women:
 - [TED Talk - indigenous activist Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza \(12 mins\)](#)
 - [Elvia Carrillo Puerto \(3 mins\)](#)
- Videocall / Q&A with Margarita's friend (psychologist in Mexico)
- Discussion ideas: (30-50 minute discussion)
 - Think about women who inspire us (famous, family members, friends) and discuss why they inspire us, and how they have changed the ways we think and act.
 - (If relevant to participants' experiences) *Para participantes con hij@s: ¿Hay lecciones o mensajes acerca de la autoestima / superación / motivación que has buscado transmitirles? ¿Cómo llegaste a querer enseñarles estas lecciones?*³¹
 - *¿Cómo eras cuando tenías quince años? Si pudieras encontrarte con la versión adolescente de ti misma, ¿qué te dirías? ¿Qué te aconsejarías?*³²

Reflection, Feedback and Closing (30 minutes)

³¹ "For participants with children: Are there any lessons or messages around self-esteem / overcoming obstacles / motivation that you've aimed to pass on to your children? How did you come to want to teach them these messages?"

³² "What were you like when you were fifteen years old? If you could meet the adolescent version of yourself, what would you tell yourself? What advice would you give yourself?"

SESSION FOUR: FUN

Opening Routine: Listas de Gratitud y Autoestima (15 minutes)

Opening Routine: Sharing (10 minutes)

Opening Routine: ¿Cómo estás hoy? (15 minutes)

Group Activity Options:

- Visit an outdoor site that participants decide on in the previous session. Participants could brainstorm places to go, and then decide, in the previous session.
 - **In this case, the group would leave from the library and take the full two hours for the trip. The following exercises could replace the opening routines.
 - On the way, open discussion:
 - *¿De qué te sientes agradecida hoy?*
 - *¿Cuál es un detalle que te guste de ti misma?*
 - *¿A dónde te gusta ir con amigos / llevar a sus familiares, etc. aquí en Poughkeepsie?*
 - *De niña, ¿qué te gustaba hacer/jugar? ¿A donde te gustaba ir?*³³
 - Each group member could bring food to share for a picnic / potluck, depending what place they visit.
- List of possible places to go:
 - [Walkway Over the Hudson](#)
 - College Hill Park, [Peach Hill Park](#), [Roosevelt Farm Lane Trail](#)
 - [Vanderbilt Mansion](#) (outdoor grounds: free, mansion entry: \$10)
 - [First Friday](#) (Poughkeepsie)
- Dance/exercise class (20-50 minutes, depending on the kind of dance)
 - [Pilates, Zumba, & BeatFit dance videos en español](#)
 - Videos to learn: [Salsa](#) [Cumbia](#) [Merengue](#) [Hip Hop](#) [Bachata](#) (or just dance, if people know already)
- Artistic activities (Mandalas: 15-20 minutes, Vision boards: 50 minutes)
 - [How to color mandalas \(arte-terapia\)](#); [Mandalas to print and color](#)
 - [How to make a vision board \(article\)](#)
- Make a playlist of favorite songs to play in next week's closing session.

Reflection, Feedback and Closing (30 minutes)

³³ “What do you feel thankful for today? What is a detail that you like about yourself? Where do you like to go with friends, bring your family members, etc. here in Poughkeepsie? When you were a girl, what did you like to do/play? Where did you like to go?”

SESSION FIVE: CLOSING

Serve food, then *¿cómo estás hoy?* opening routine (15 minutes)

**Margarita and I discussed the possibility of serving more food than just a small snack at this meeting, maybe more of a meal or several snacks. The recipes could be inspired by the food/nutrition session and the resources that the group looks at for that week. There could also be a dessert because it's a celebration!

Discussion in pairs (25 minutes)

The group stays in the same pairs/groups of three as the opening routine and can use these questions as starting points for discussion:

1. *¿Cómo era tu: rutina diaria, diálogo interior, perspectiva de tu bienestar y percepción de ti misma, antes de este taller? ¿Sientes que has cambiado en alguno de estos aspectos a través de este programa?*
2. *¿Has notado otros cambios en ti misma en el transcurso de este taller?*
3. *¿Hay algún tema que te hubiera gustado explorar más profundamente en este taller, o del cual piensas aprender más en tu vida afuera de este programa?*³⁴

Conversation on Lessons Learned (45 minutes – 1 hour)

Ideas for conversation topics (similar as in pairs):

- *¿Qué aprendiste en este grupo y a través de estas sesiones, que te gustaría recordar en el futuro?*
- *¿Tienes alguna actividad favorita de las que hicimos en este taller? ¿Cuál(es) te gustaría seguir utilizando en tu vida diaria?*
- *Agradecimientos/detalles que aprecian de las demás, comentarios que te impactaron, etc.*
- *Sugerencias para temas, actividades y cambios a la estructura del programa, para versiones futuras de este taller.*³⁵

Celebration! (30 minutes or whatever time remains)

- Play music, dance, eat, etc.

³⁴ 1. “What was your: daily routine, inner dialogue, perspective of your well-being, and perception of yourself, before this workshop? Do you feel that you’ve changed in any of these aspects through this program?”

2. “Have you noticed other changes in yourself during the course of this workshop?”

3. “Is there any topic you would have liked to explore more deeply in this workshop, or that you’re planning to learn more about in your life outside this program?”

³⁵ “What did you learn in this group and throughout these sessions that you’d like to remember in the future?” “Do you have a favorite activity that we did in this workshop? Which one(s) would you like to continue to use in your daily life?” “Thanks/appreciations for other workshop participants, comments that impacted you, etc.” “Suggestions for topics, activities, and changes to the structure of the program, for future versions of this workshop.”

Looking Forward: Community Feedback and Ideas for Future Programs

To conclude this piece, I will mention some additional topics and approaches that Poughkeepsie community members, my advisors, Margarita, and I have thought of during this workshop development process. These ideas have influenced how I have envisioned the *Crezcamos Juntas* series and, while I could not incorporate all of them into the five workshop sessions for this project, they could serve as sources of inspiration for future Poughkeepsie community programs. A main challenge I faced when developing this workshop was the question of whether, and how, to bring people who work in different areas of well-being in Poughkeepsie into the *Crezcamos Juntas* sessions.³⁶ Depending on the feedback from participants, it could be engaging and beneficial to invite nutritionists, social workers, fitness instructors, and other Poughkeepsie health advocates to share information about their work and about different areas of well-being. This approach could also be applied to workshops that focus on other topics besides personal and collective well-being.

Regarding the content of the workshop series, the theme of holistic personal and collective well-being received several positive responses in the survey period; however, several other themes emerged across the surveys and from my conversations with Latinas in Poughkeepsie. As I mentioned, many survey respondents expressed interest in workshops to learn a skill or trade (*oficio*) and to learn English. Adriance Public Library already offers English courses, as does the Family Partnership Center and other community-based organizations.

³⁶ This question of the role of “experts” in different fields of well-being posed significant challenges for me. On the one hand, I imagined *Crezcamos Juntas* as a space for collective knowledge production, in which the only experts in the room were the participants themselves (see Chapter Five). On the other hand, Margarita suggested that for certain topics, such as yoga, it could be more effective to invite a trained professional to co-facilitate the workshop session. My advisors noted that participants may want to access “expert” knowledge particularly because it often is inaccessible to them, whether due to cost, language, location, or institutional barriers. It is therefore crucial to provide mechanisms for participants to offer their feedback, and to incorporate the resources and invite the speakers that participants identify as helpful and interesting to them.

Nonetheless, high-quality, culturally competent adult English instruction is a vital area of education whose expansion would undoubtedly benefit Poughkeepsie's immigrant populations.

Prof. Woods suggested combining these top three areas of interest among Poughkeepsie Latinas – well-being, learning an *oficio*, and learning English – through one holistic workshop series. In the context of *Crezcamos Juntas*, I considered that the incorporation of professional development and English instruction could detract from the emphasis on well-being and the focus on cultivating a trusting, community-oriented space. Although I have geared this workshop series more towards open discussion and mutual learning, I see the immense value in a workshop series that is more focused on direct instruction in a specific area, such as English or an *oficio*. I could therefore envision a future program for Spanish-speaking immigrants that combined these two areas under a larger theme of professional development. Such a workshop could also incorporate information and resources regarding workers' rights in a variety of professions.

In addition to these topics that community members emphasized in their survey responses, several other important issues arose in my conversations with Latinas at the public library and throughout Poughkeepsie. Some of these topics related to women's personal experiences and approaches to day-to-day challenges:

- memories of their childhoods;
- cultural practices in their countries of origin;
- managing their personal finances, familial finances, and remittances to their families in their countries of origin;
- dealing with feelings of isolation upon immigrating to Poughkeepsie;
- making time for exercise and occasionally spending a bit more money on healthier foods because “*vale la pena*.” (“It’s worth it.”)

However, the majority of the topics that community members highlighted were related to the raising of children in particular social contexts:

- the challenges of raising children in a digital and materialist era;

- parents' efforts to engage with their children's educations and the barriers to this involvement;
- the "Americanization" of children and youth;
- bullying, racism, xenophobia, and violence in schools;
- the lack of academic and personal motivation among adolescents;
- parents' struggles to support their teenage children while working long hours; and, consequently,
- the lack of supportive programming for these young people.

It struck me that on several different occasions, community members expressed concern for the well-being, and particularly the emotional health, of adolescents in Poughkeepsie. When I followed up with Julia towards the end of my project and asked her for additional suggestions, her first comment was, "*tal vez un espacio para las señoritas*"³⁷ and for young men as well. Julia explained that she had observed that bullying was a major issue among teenagers, one with grave consequences for their emotional health and their behavior towards themselves and others. She suggested that a similar workshop to *Crezcamos Juntas*, with emphases on well-being and self-esteem, could greatly benefit young people in Poughkeepsie.

Future projects could research the current programs for teenagers in Poughkeepsie and uncover which issues and populations are currently included and excluded in Poughkeepsie youth programs. I would recommend that such initiatives center direct conversation with the youth themselves, so as to determine whether they perceive a need for this type of program and would want to participate in and/or help develop the series. There is enormous potential for the expansion of resources that bring people together, both within Poughkeepsie and between Vassar College and the greater Poughkeepsie community. It is my hope that my reflections on my senior project can encourage Vassar students to work in solidarity with Poughkeepsie community

³⁷ "perhaps a space for young women"

members, returning to the same motivations of collaboration, reciprocity, and horizontality that have guided me through my senior project.

Appendix A: Library Outreach Survey

La biblioteca escucha la opinión latina de Poughkeepsie

The library listens to the opinions of Poughkeepsie's Latinx community:

Adriance Memorial Public Library Outreach Survey

A. Evaluando conocimiento general de la biblioteca Adriance

1. ¿Ha escuchado de la biblioteca de la ciudad de Poughkeepsie?

(A la cual a veces le dicen la librería)

SÍ _____ NO _____

2. ¿Ha visitado a la biblioteca Adriance?

SÍ _____ NO _____

3. (Si respondió "SÍ" a la #2)

Cuando ha visitado a la biblioteca, ¿Ha requerido la ayuda en español?

SÍ _____ NO _____

4. (Si respondió "SÍ" a la #3) ¿En qué se le ayudó?

(Si respondió "NO" a la #3)

¿Por qué no requiso la ayuda en español?

_____ No fue necesaria _____ No sabía de la ayuda en español

B. Evaluando interacciones con los programas en español

5. ¿Sabía que la biblioteca ofrece programas en español?

SÍ _____ NO _____

6. ¿Ha utilizado los programas en español que ofrece la biblioteca?

SÍ _____ NO _____

7. ¿Qué servicios o programas en español ha utilizado?

_____ Libros prestados

_____ DVDs prestados

_____ Uso de computadoras:

_____ Niños

_____ Adultos

_____ Uso de fax

_____ Conferencias o charlas informativas

_____ Ayuda escolar para niños

_____ Clases o programas para niños - ¿En inglés o español? (Si sabe):

_____ Clases o programas en español - ¿Cuál(es)?

C. Solicitando retroalimentación: Opiniones y necesidades

8. ¿Qué información necesita usted, o clases que le gustaría que la biblioteca ofreciera para ayudarle en su desarrollo profesional (trabajo)?
9. ¿Qué programas, clases o servicios necesita usted, y que la biblioteca pudiera ofrecer para su bienestar personal?
10. ¿A qué se dedica usted? (Profesiones, actividades, aspiraciones)

D. Para participantes femeninas, acerca de un nuevo taller

11. ¿De estos seis programas que pudiera ofrecer la biblioteca, a cuál es más probable que usted asistiera?
 - ___ Taller de bienestar personal (físico, emocional, espiritual)
 - ___ Grupo de apoyo femenino: compartiendo nuestros testimonios
 - ___ Taller de actividades creativas para bienestar personal: (collage, colorear, poesía, mural)
 - ___ Clases para aprender un oficio
 - ___ Clases de desarrollo profesional
 - ___ Clases de actividades meditativas (con apoyo de un/a experta)
12. ¿Le gustaría recibir más información sobre una nueva clase en la biblioteca?
¿Desea darnos su número de teléfono?

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